

The Athenian Mercury:

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Quest. 1. **W**hat's Something? what's Nothing?
what's Matter? what's Form?
what's Motion? what's Privation?
what's Pleasure? what's Pain?

Ans. Something's any thing. Nothing is no-thing. Matter and Form is every thing. Privation is nothing, Motion is a kind of a Somewhatkin, (to borrow one of Fairfax's words) between something and nothing. Pleasure and Pain are a couple of *Jene scay quai's*, or *Whatchecallums*, that every body feels, and no body knows what to make of, — and there's a short answer to a hasty Querist. But because we doubt 'twill hardly satisfy either the Querist, or other Readers, we must dissect this monstrous Query, which has so many young ones in the Belly on't, and see what we can make of 'em all, distinct from one another.

Q. 1. What's Something?

Ans. 'Tis not easie to find any larger or clearer Word to explain it. It seems the same with *Aliquid*, and to include *Omne Ens*, all kinds of Entity's, or Beings, whether real, or only the works of Fiction or Fantasy, and Reason, which last have at least a Being in the Mind, tho' none without it.

Quest. 2. What's Nothing?

Ans. The Metaphysicians have been so Critical, to make I know'n't how many Tribes and Classes, sorts and sizes of Nothing; among all which they make the highest, or if you please the lowest Degree of it, namely, *purum nihil*, pure, or meer Nothing, to consist in a repugnancy, absolute Impossibility, or Contradiction, as a Round-square, Transubstantiation, &c. But we shou'd think there's yet a more tiny Nothing than even this; this kind of Nothing terminates the Thoughts, is conceiv'd as a real Object, and may have propositions form'd concerning it, tho' those, we confess, all grounded upon mistake, or Fancy, but so is also any fictitious being; a *Chimera*, *Hircocoeve*, &c. things as really contradictory, and destructive of their own Beings, as a Round Square. But we may yet split the Hair much finer, and try to conceive a Nothing not conceiv'd, no Proposition or Enunciation found concerning it, but lurking in the dark Womb of a Potential Impossibility, (forgive the seeming Contradiction:) Now such a Nothing as this, before 'tis conceiv'd in the Mind at least, if not after, seems to have less of Being, or to be a purer Nothing than any other Species which have bin assign'd by Philosophers. But enough of Nothing, which is such a No-Subject, that we hope the Querist will take the Advice of the Old Song upon Nothing, and won't be angry, tho' we make nothing on't?

Quest. 3, 4. What's Matter? what's Form?

Ans. They are every thing, we mean all visible things are made up of 'em: But we must try if we can come a little nearer, or else this won't much edifie. Matter, we think may be thus describ'd: 'Tis a Being extended, weighty and passive, susceptible of all Qualities, out of which all Bodies are made, and into which they may be again resolv'd. 'Tis an extended Being, which Extension differences it from Spirit, and may seem to be its very Essence. This Extension, or Bulk, is no more than having proper quantitative parts, or parts differing in size, and place, and number, so as they can't flow all together into a Point, or so much as two single Atoms exist in the place of one; quite contrary to our Notion of Spirit, which takes up no more room than Thought, its genuine Issue; an Atom being so call'd, as Gassendus thinks, rather from its Impenetrability than Indivisibility. Secondly, 'Tis weighty, Weight or Gravity is generally assign'd as a Property of Matter, as being always either in motion, or an endeavour for motion, and this twofold, by the Epicureans, ei-

ther in a strait Line, or by Reflexion, one of a single Atom, the other, when this meets that, and jostle in the dark. We confess our Notion is quite contrary to theirs in the present Case, this very weight, or Gravity of matter being in our Judgment an absolute Bar against any motion, till mov'd by some Exterior Being; nor can we conceive how any Atom, or larger part of matter, shou'd possibly move, or have so much as any Gravitation or tendency any further than its own proper Center; nor how they shou'd fly out, or ramble about towards one another, to produce any such Jumble, or motion of Deflexion, any more than how a Stone in our World shou'd take a Fegary, and fly up to the Moon. However, this very Notion of theirs secures and proves our next assign'd Property of Matter, that 'tis in it self purely passive, as it must be, if thus weighty, and capable of having new motion impress'd by any External Object, as they themselves describe it; and if so, it can no more think, which is proper Action, no not, tho' motion and a determinate motion be added to't, than a Flint and Steel by being knockt one against t'other, can produce Definitions and Syllogisms, as a very Ingenious Person expresses it.

Again, Matter, first pure matter, as we may conceive it, tho' no where actually find it, is susceptible of all Qualities, and consequently it self endu'd with none, unless such as are at least consequentive of its Essence, (as Figure, weight, and perhaps Asperity, or Levity, &c.) but for the others, as Colours, Taste, &c. Gassendus uses one invincible Argument, that his Atoms can have none of 'em, because if they had for Instance, Colours, they cou'd never change them, but must always appear the same; whereas we see even the same matter, admits different Colours, only by a different position of parts: To which may be added, another Notion embrac'd generally by the Corpuscularians, (Mr. Hobbs in his Tripos, and others,) that these Qualities are properly in us, in the Percipient rather than the Object, for example, Whiteness in the Eye, rather than the Paper; the particular modification or Configuration of Matter producing such or such Idea's in the Mind say some, in the Body others, which however first matter never had, nor are they contain'd in our Notion of it.

After this, there will be no great difficulty in the latter part of our Description; for if Matter be the last Subject of all Accidents, susceptible of all Qualities, and properly prepossessed with none, (besides one or two that seem to be of its Essence;) if this holds, there will be little doubt but that all Bodies must be compos'd out of it, and consequently resolvable into it.

Now for Form, the Old Folks drily defin'd it, That by which a Thing is what it is. — The old whimsy of substantial Forms, which as represented, we can hardly think so Wise a Man as Aristotle ever held, being now quite laugh'd out of Door, unless in the case of a humane Soul; these we say being laid aside, and a many of their Unintelligible Qualities, 'tis now generally held that the particular modification of Matter, or at least in some Instances, with the addition of motion, gives the Essence or Form to material Beings, making 'em either this or that, according to the stamp or mold that's given 'em.

Quest. 5. What's Motion?

Ans. We say 'tis a kind of a diminutive somewhat, between something and nothing, by which, we mean, 'tis akin to Time, and those other Beings, it there be any other such, which are always in a Flux, and therefore considering whole time, or perfect motion, they seem no other than Bings of Reason, because what they are, they may be thought to owe to our Conception, never exist-

ing all *actually* together. If any ask further how we would describe *Motion*, so as to be understood, we can only tell 'em what our own *Notion* of it is, without imposing it upon others — We would therefore call it — “The *Successive respect of Body to Body*, which seems to us a pretty clear description of proper *Motion*.”

Quest. 6. *What's Privation?*

Ans. We call it *Nothing* — We would be understood *nothing positive*, since any such is expressly excluded by its very Name, whether we take *Privation* for a meer absence of *Form* before ever introduc'd, or for a *ceasing* or *unravelling* of that *Form* where it once has been — as *Darkness* in the *Air*, or *Blindness* in a *Man*, tho' the truth is, such a *Blindness* seems more than *nothing*; there is something *actual* and *real* that's the Cause on't, as perhaps the *Gutta Serena*, or some other Accident, but yet still the very *formality* of the *Blindness* is something *wanting*, a meer *Privation*, or *Negation*.

Quest. 7, 8. *What's Pleasure? What's Pain?*

Ans. We Answer to both, that 'tis not easie to describe 'em, tho' so easie to know 'em — and perhaps generally speaking, the more *sensible* and *obvious* any thing is, the more a *Man* may be to seek for a clear *Philosophical* *Notion* of it, *Science* being many removes from singular and sensible Objects, tho' grounded upon them. Besides, what's one man's *pleasure* is another's *pain*, or according to the Proverb, *Meat, Poison*, and so of the other Senses — And again, *Pleasure* is certainly in some Cases, nothing but *Privation of Pain*, (as *Ease* after a violent *Fit* of the *Stone* or *Tooth-ach*) and the very *formality* of *Pain* is generally made something *Private* or *Negative*, namely the absence of what's good or *pleasant*. For a general Description of 'em both, which may reach all the Species, and include both *Body* and *Mind*, we think this following may do — *Pleasure* is a *perception* of what's agreeable to our *Natures* — and *Pain*, just the contrary, of what's disagreeable or inconvenient — If any say, this is no more than *Pleasure's pleasure*, and *Pain* is *pain*, we would be oblig'd to them for a more clear and general *Notion* of both those *Affections* than we have here given.

Quest. 9. *What's the Reason that Xp̄o stands for Christ in Lawyers writing?*

Ans. 'Tis not only in *Lawyers writing*, but in all ancient Manuscripts, those we mean in the time of *Monkery* — whence that manner of abbreviation has been deliver'd down even to the *present Ages*, and used in many *Inscriptions*, one of which may be seen round the *Sounding-board* of the *Pulpit* in the Church of *Albhallows Barking*, near the *Tower*. The reason and rise of it is not hard to find, being no other than the blundering Ignorance of old *Monkish Transcribers*, who finding *Xp̄o* and *χ̄s* often written for *χ̄esds* and *χ̄esū*, mistook the *χ̄* and the *p* for our *X* and *p*, as they have done in several other words that we cou'd instance, and which may have been observed by any who have had but the least *Converse* in Manuscripts: To give one for all, *St. Jerom* in his *Prologue* to the Book of *Job* makes use of the word — *ἐξουσιουένως* — this was *Geek* with a vengeance to the poor old Monks that had occasion to transcribe it, which they have murder'd most unmercifully in most of the old Copies, some writing it one way, some another, tho' almost all mistaking the *χ̄* for an *X*, and so writing it.

Quest. 10. *Gentlemen, I humbly beg your Advice in this: About three years ago I was privately married to a young Man without my Friends Consent or Knowledge, he promised he would not Bed with me 'till he had performed a Journey which he was to take, neither did he; and he soon went his Journey, and did not return 'till about a Year agoe: During his absence I was importun'd and married to another Man, and had a Child by him before the other came back; we are all three in trouble of mind about it, now I desire to be satisfied about it by you, what I must do in this, whether I may be free with the Man that I last married? or whether I must abstain from his Bed? or which of these Men is my real Husband, seeing the first never Bedded with me? I beg your Advice in your next Mercury, because I must leave the City in a few dayes, and you will Oblige a discontented Woman.*

Ans. By the Law of God the first is your Husband,

by the Law of the Land the last; by the same Law that you belong to the first, he may disengage himself from you, or may retain you; but by the Law of the Land he can't do the last. The best Method that we know of, is that you beg Pardon both of God and him. As for his Case, we believe he has no reason to trouble himself about it, since he is not only at liberty to marry whom and when he pleases, but to thank God that he has escaped such a Partner; for if she durst break these Sacred Bands, which to keep inviolable she had so solemnly call'd God to Witness, 'tis to be doubted no happy Life cou'd have been led with her, for so much Folly or Impiety was no promising Omen; tho' after all if the matter was not of too weighty a Concern, we should hardly forbear telling the Voyager he was serv'd well enough, to Marry, and let another step to Bed to his Mistress before him.

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